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## PETROGLYPHS IN SOUTHEASTERN ALASKA

By GEORGE T. EMMONS

Primitive man throughout all ages and in all regions has ever shown a desire to perpetuate the history of the past and to record the story of his life. Wanting in specific characters, he employs pictures, carvings, and structures — the direct product of his surroundings — to illustrate and transmit his traditions, genealogy, and pursuits, and these are realistic or conventional according to his development.

The Tlingit of southeastern Alaska, living under most favorable conditions of climate and food supply, with abundant leisure to cultivate an innate sense of art, evolved in time a rich ceremonial that had for its purpose the glorification of the family in the display of the totem, or the practice of shamanistic rites which constituted his nearest approach to any form of religion or worship. Having at hand a variety of material, as rock, wood, grasses, the pelts of animals, and wool for weaving, besides mineral and vegetable coloring substances, his thoughts found expression in many forms of art, and he carved, painted, or wove realistic and conventional forms upon all of his belongings, which give that distinctive character and wealth of color to the life of this section.

Most permanent but least intelligible of all the earlier works of the Tlingit are their petroglyphs, which are of frequent occurrence in the vicinity of old village sites on the islands of the Alexander archipelago and the adjacent littoral. The present generation, even the oldest natives, have no knowledge of their origin or of their *raison d'être*. Some even deny that they are the product of their ancestors, and attribute them to a stranger people who in traveling along these shores, before their existence, made such signs to guide them on their way in returning or in again going over the ground ; but this explanation is not worthy of consideration, for the carvings are very often in secluded bays beyond the routes of travel. The glyphs mark old living sites that are still traditional with the people,

and aside from the circles, spirals, and a few indistinguishable figures, they agree too nearly with the characteristic art of the Tlingit for us to ascribe them to others.

While some are found on prominent ledges and cliffs overlooking the water, in most instances the petroglyphs ornament isolated boulders and beach rocks imbedded in the sand of the shore near the level of the tide. In the latter position they would seem to have served no useful purpose other than as a record of some tradition or legend, or as a means of displaying the emblem of the clan. In some instances they are simply the product of leisure moments and that love of the ornate that manifests itself throughout the life of this region.

In all the petroglyphs examined and here illustrated the grooves are apparently made by pecking and are in width from one half to three quarters of an inch, ranging in depth from one eighth to one fourth of an inch according to their state of preservation.

Some of the glyphs show considerable age, while in others the marks of the pecking implement are still clearly visible. From the corroborative evidence of contemporary events I can state that the one here discovered on Baranof island was in situ at the beginning of the nineteenth century; but how much earlier is unknown, for the Kake-satter family of the Sitka tribe, whose country this was, say that their chief, Katlean, who led the attack and destroyed the first Russian fort at Old Sitka in 1802, had a house on the shore at this point and used this rock as a seat.

What appear to be the older carvings show less realism, are more severe in outline, and are wanting in detail; and more often the principal characters are joined by means of numerous lines, circles, and irregular forms that are meaningless in themselves, but serve the purpose of making one connected picture, which, I believe, always represents a story. In those carvings that, from the roughly-pecked fractures made by the hand-stone, can be identified absolutely as of more recent workmanship, the forms are very true to nature and are much more ornate; and in a majority of cases the figures occupy separate fields, or, if together, are not connected and apparently bear no relation to one another.

In 1888, while hunting in one of the deep bays that indent the



Extreme length, 18 in.; Width at top, 12 in. (Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., E-2206 )

PETROGLYPH (FACE) IN SOUTHEASTERN ALASKA

western coast of Baranof island, I met a very old native who claimed the locality by hereditary right, and in consideration of some presents was induced to show me a carved rock that my native hunters knew existed but had never seen.

It was near the mouth of a stream, at the edge of the woods, a short distance above the high-tide mark. Hereabouts, at least a century back, was a small village of which nothing remains and even the exact site is uncertain. The boulder was irregular in shape but approaching a pyramidal form, some four feet high and of equal dimensions at the base. It was partly covered by a great decayed tree trunk, and wholly concealed by the branches and high salt-water grass. We could remove the obstructions from but one of the three faces, which was completely covered with a single closely connected picture, made up apparently of five principal figures. The grooved lines were almost obliterated in places by weathering, giving evidence of considerable age. The two covered sides were, I believe, ornamented. Although I could not clear them more than to feel some grooves, my guide interpreted the design, not perhaps from his own ideas, but rather from what he had been told by those who had gone before. When I had finished my examination, with something akin to reverence he covered the markings over completely with branches and debris, and as he and the native hunters who accompanied me have long since gone to their fathers, it remains to-day a forgotten monument of the past.

The picture (fig. 44) will be seen to be a complex arrangement of distinct figures connected throughout, and while my guide, who was a very primitive old Tlingit, could identify only the individual forms, to any one familiar with the mythology of this people their context clearly tells the oldest story of mankind — the creation.

This legend, common to all the Northwest Coast tribes, is too familiar to need repetition in full, so I will merely mention the salient features for a clear understanding of the picture.

The world in the beginning was a chaotic mass of rock and ocean, enveloped in darkness and possessed by a few powerful spirits which jealously guarded the elements necessary to human life. A benign spirit, known as Yehllh, who assumed many forms but more often appeared in the guise of a raven, came upon the

scene, created man, and wresting from the other spirits light, fresh water, and fire, he governed the winds, gave to his children all these benefits, and then disappeared.

In the picture Yehlh is beneath figure A, and is distinguished by the head and long bill attached to what appears to be a body with a leg and a foot in the double curved line depending from the head. To the rear the tail coming from the circle connects with B, which

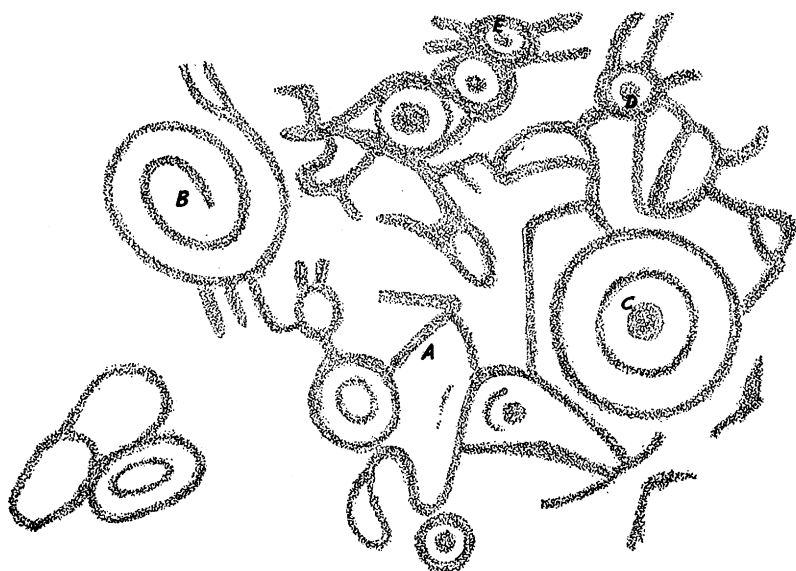


FIG. 44. — Tlingit myth represented in a petroglyph.

my interpreter named *una kgna hihk*, 'where the sunlight comes from.' In the bill of the raven is a half obliterated line which might signify the piece of fire that Yehlh stole from the sun and gave to the earth, but his principal connection with the sun was its release from captivity to light the world. Joined with the raven above and to the right is a figure, made up of three concentric circles (C), that represents the earth. Directly above this is a highly conventional form (D) identified as Hoon, the north wind, that plays an important part in the life of this northern country. To the left, above and over the center (E), is Kun-nook, the guardian of fresh water, shown often in painting and carving as a wolf form, from whom Yehlh stole



Width, *a* to *b*,  $14\frac{1}{2}$  in.; Height, *b* to *c*, 21 in.; Depth of incision, about  $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., E 2207 )

PETROGLYPH IN SOUTHEASTERN ALASKA

a few drops in his bill and which, as he flew over the world, he let fall here and there, forming the rivers and the lakes.

The illustration is from a simple sketch made on the ground ; it does not pretend to exactness, but is a fair representation in general outline and proportions. Age and the elements have almost effaced some of the grooves, and possibly others are wholly lost, which would account for several sketchy lines beyond figures A and C and in the lower left-hand corner, but by feeling the depressions and filling them in with black beech mud I was able to bring out the design very clearly.

Near the northwestern extremity of Etoline island, included between two jutting rocky points, is a stretch of sand beach, and scattered along at and above the level of the tide are numerous smooth dark-gray rocks, seldom exceeding three feet in dimensions, irregular in shape, but generally presenting a flattened surface suitable for petroglyphs. Nearly all of these bear single figures, pecked in shallow grooves, representing a variety of subjects that in most instances are so realistic that the artist's meaning is unmistakable. Parts of several have been obliterated by the elements and the wash of the tide, or have never been finished, which make their identification uncertain, while two or three in which several indeterminate figures are grouped convey no intelligent meaning to the native. The animal designs, which largely predominate, are all totemic in character, representing the principal emblems of the family divisions of the Stikine tribe that inhabits this locality. Within the limits of the choice of subjects it would appear that the shape of the rock surface to be ornamented determined the selection of the particular character to be employed, that it might cover the greater space.

These carvings are unquestionably of two distinct periods. In the older ones the grooves are worn smooth and in places are almost lost to view through weathering and the action of the higher tides. Others, of a comparatively recent date, show the roughened indentations of the pecking implement. I can only offer in explanation of this difference that the old village site at this point was occupied at two different periods, which with the Tlingit was not an uncommon practice, as I can point to half a dozen living places that have been occupied, deserted, and reoccupied in turn. The natives here-



abouts can offer no explanation for the making of these pictures, nor as to their age; they simply say that they were there in the lives of their father's fathers, which means nothing.

The following illustrations are likewise from rough sketches which merely give the picture and do not pretend to exactness of proportion.

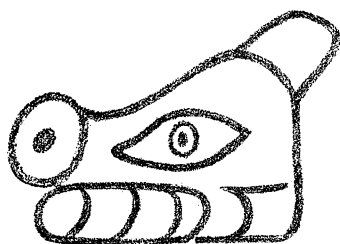


FIG. 45.

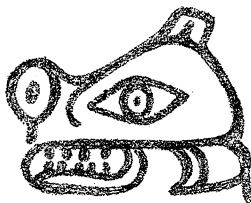


FIG. 46.

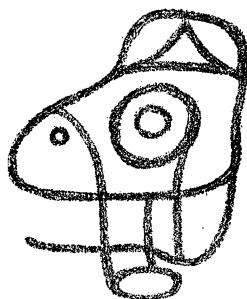


FIG. 47.

Figures 45 to 47 represent *goutch 'showee*, wolf's head, which is distinguished by the prominent nose and ears. In Fig. 45 the teeth are indicated by the divisions of the mouth. In Fig. 46 the teeth are expressed by the marks, back of which wrinkles of the jaw are shown in the two curved lines, and the same are found in Fig. 45. Fig. 47 is a more conventional expression. The ear identifies the wolf's head more than the nose, which, though prolonged, is not so characteristic. The peculiar figure depending from the eye and the nose cannot be explained except as an individual conceit of the artist added for ornamental purposes, but I would suggest that it has some connection with the nose and nostril that in the drawing are not accentuated.

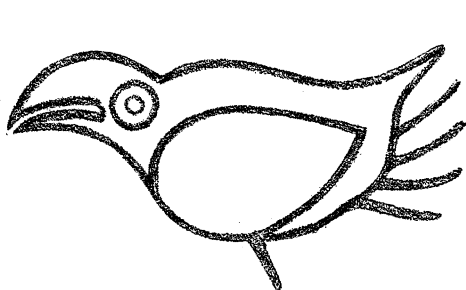


FIG. 48.



FIG. 49.

Figure 48 represents a very realistic raven form, *yehlh*, determined by the bill in particular.

Figure 49 is a more conventional type of the raven. The wing, in a fan-

ciful double form, is shown over the back, and the tail in the rear. The bill in this figure is truer to nature than in the previous drawing, and a slight crest is shown over the head which is often added to the conventional form. The markings of the body, while ornamental in character, also refer to the internal structures.



FIG. 50.



FIG. 51.

Figure 50 is identified as the head of a sandhill crane, *dulth showee*, the typical feature of which is the long bill. In the picture this is suggested rather than expressed, the continuation being left to the imagination, for I could not distinguish the grooved lines beyond the point shown, which from their direction would indicate a great length before meeting. The long neck, which is a feature of this bird, is shown by the single curved line beyond the head. I would suggest in explanation of this petroglyph that for some reason the artist for want of time may never have finished it beyond this point, or possibly he exhausted his field, for it measured 14 ft. in length by 12 ft. in height.

Figure 51 shows the head of an eagle, which is easily recognized by the large curved upper bill turned down almost at a right angle to its outward course. The ear or crest on the head is regarded more as a head-dress ornament such as a chief might wear, and as the eagle is one of the highest emblems of a family, the head in pictography is often so represented as a token of esteem.

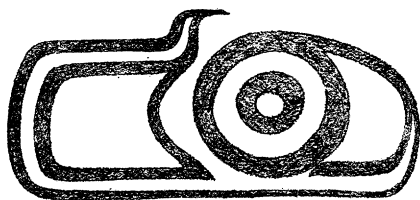


FIG. 52.

Figure 52 is identified as *chak quiddie*, eagle's nest. It is a conventional design, very similar to the carvings found on old feast dishes from the Haida and the Tsimshian. In form it represents an eagle's head. The upper and the lower bills are in one, and the shape of the head, so noticeable in that of the

eagle, is marked by the curved rise above the eye. This picture is 18 ft. long by 10 ft. high.

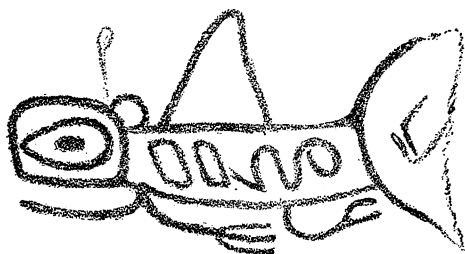


FIG. 53.

Figure 53 represents a killer whale (*Delphinus orca*), readily recognized by the exaggerated dorsal fin that distinguishes it from the other members of the whale family, all of which have the blunt head, blow-hole, and large tail. In this figure the water-spout from the circular blow-hole is shown. The under fins take the form of arms and

hands—an artist's license often employed. The body ornamentation besides decorating a bare space is a sketchy representation of the internal structure and organs, the curved line indicating the intestines.



FIG. 54.

Figure 54 is an excellent drawing of a salmon, *khart*. The head and the fins and tail are most characteristic. The ornamentation of the body shows the gills and the bone structure.

Figure 55 is an easily recognized shark, *toose*. The characteristic features of this fish are primarily the pointed head and the heterocerc tail; but this drawing is true to nature in its entirety—a wonderfully accurate and artistic piece of work.

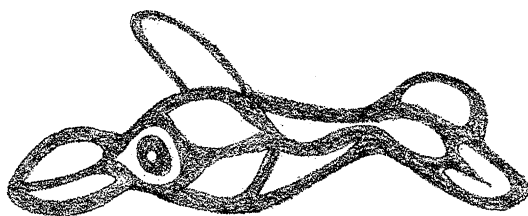


FIG. 55.

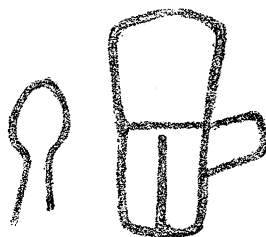


FIG. 56.

Figure 56. The main figure shows the copper, *tinneh*. It consisted of a shield-like plate, varying in size from tiny ornaments worn on the dancing robe or as ear-rings, to like forms four feet in height. While hardly to be called money, these coppers had a commercial value according to their size, and again they had an imaginary value according to their use and ownership. They were a sign of wealth, and were given away, whole or in pieces, upon potlatch occasions, displayed or placed upon mortuary columns. Originally

they were hammered out of native copper, but later they were manufactured and traded to the natives. The feature of a projection or handle on the side is unexplained. The unfinished figure appears in juxtaposition as shown, but is unidentified.

The numerous circles and spirals that are always in evidence whenever petroglyphs occur are variously interpreted by the best informed natives, and while in some cases there seems to be a general agreement, I do not know that we get at the meaning of those who executed them.

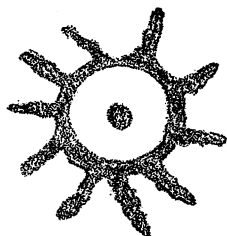


FIG. 57.



FIG. 58.



FIG. 59.

Figures 57, 58, 59 are said to represent the sun, which is emblematically used in carved forms and less frequently in pictography by the Tlingit. The wooden rattle—more often that of the shaman—which typifies the sun, is circular in form and hollow in the center or has a carved face within a smaller circle. In several cases the rays are represented as grooves or lines of inlaying, radiating from the center. The identification of Fig. 57 as the sun seems to be very reasonable, agreeing with the rattle form described. Figs. 58 and 59, consisting of concentric circles, are similarly identified, and are subjects of reasonable doubt, I should say, as this design is also used to represent the earth.

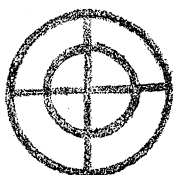


FIG. 60.



FIG. 61.

Figure 60 is said to represent the very old form of ceremonial rattle (*chuck-ah-hut-tar*) described by the earliest Europeans to visit the Northwest coast, and it has survived to within the last few years in its primitive form. It consisted of a frame of two circles of bent twigs lashed to two cross-bars at right angles to each other, which likewise served as a handle. The circles were hung with puffin beaks, deer dew-hoofs, or bits of ivory, horn, or bone, to make a rattling sound.

Figure 61 is identified as the wood-worm, which is a totemic emblem of one of the principal families of the Tlingit.

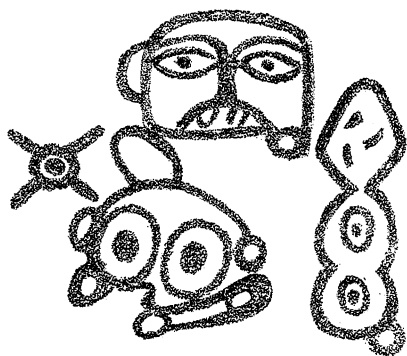


FIG. 62.

The figures shown in Fig. 62 are together on one rock; they are separate and apparently have no connected meaning. The upper face is human in form and is so identified by the one ear. The other figures are unknown, and while the one to the right shows a strong resemblance to a shark's head at the top, and the small uppermost figure to the left has every appearance of a starfish, and the more intricate one under the head shows something of the killer whale in the dorsal fin, I

offer these explanations only as suggestions.



FIG. 63.

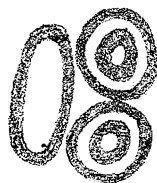


FIG. 65.

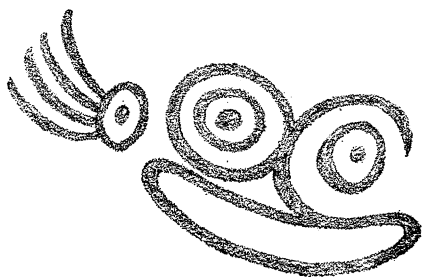


FIG. 64.



FIG. 66.

Figures 63 to 66 represent heads and faces, human or otherwise, rudely executed, half finished or partially obliterated. Fig. 63 appears simply as ornamental characters without any particular meaning. Fig. 64 is half obliterated. To the left of the head is shown what appears to be a hand or a foot. Figs. 65 and 66 are indeterminate faces.

PRINCETON,

NEW JERSEY.